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ABSTRACT

An analysis of Australia's two conflicting trends in school governance and their effectiveness in meeting two major educational challenges is the purpose of this paper. Nationalization, which refers to greater centralization and increased national regulation; and privatization, which refers to decentralization, deregulation, and increased local autonomy, are the two dominant perspectives on school governance. The country's two major educational challenges include the extension of a full, formal secondary education, and the maintenance of teaching quality. A conclusion is that school governance cannot be reduced to simple issues and should include participation in decision making at all levels. A recommendation is made for the development of a comprehensive, unified educational system, with a focus on increased support from higher education for teaching, to meet the nation's two educational challenges. (9 references) (LMI)

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Futures for Schooling in Australia: Nationalisation, Privatisation or Unification?

LYNDSAY CONNORS

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1989

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This paper was first delivered as the Biennial Oration of the Queensland Chapter of the Australian College of Education in July 1989.

Futures for Schooling in Australia: Nationalisation, Privatisation or Unification?

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The school system in Australia is undergoing changes which have the potential to shake it to the foundations. It is both timely and necessary, as structures that have been in place for over a century are starting to give way, to ask whether these changes are the right changes. Will they improve the overall quality of schooling in Australia?

Behind these changes lie economic and political demands for greater efficiency and accountability in the use of public resources to produce educational outcomes. On the one hand, is the belief that the response to these demands lies in greater cohesion, creating imperatives towards increased coordination and collaboration at the national level, and removal or unnecessary differences among States. On the other hand, the belief that the response to these demands for efficiency and accountability lies in freeing public schools from their accustomed bureaucratic controls and constraints, thus creating responsibilities that were once the preserve of centralised State bureaucracies.

A great deal of energy is being spent throughout this country on the process of nationalising, centralising and regulating the process of schooling; and, in this sense, making it a more public enterprise. At the same time, even greater energy is being expended on the apparently contrary enterprise of localising, decentralising and deregulating public school systems, and in this sense making schooling more private. There is a need to examine the context in which these apparently conflicting forces are working, to explore their educational implications, and to ask ourselves whether the energy being spent on them is justified, or whether it should be redirected.

I have used the terms 'nationalisation' and 'privatisation' in the title of my paper. I should explain, at this stage, that I have used

these terms as broad labels, under which to group related trends. Under the term 'nationalisation', I refer to the trends to greater centralisation, coordination and regulation of schooling - including the trend to refer responsibility for decisions to the national arena. Under the term 'privatisation', I will refer to trends towards decentralisation, fragmentation and deregulation of schooling - including the trends to devolve responsibility for decisions to local school communities, and to provide incentives for schools within the public sector to raise funds from private sources; while continuing to provide public funding for schools operating outside the public sector.

In many countries, schooling has traditionally and primarily been the business of local authorities. The development of highly centralised State school systems and authoritarian patterns of decision-making in Australia have been attributed by successive commentators to our convict origins; the concentration of population in capital cities and coastal areas; the hard conditions of country living which discouraged demands for local government; and the bitterness of sectarian rivalry which bred suspicion of local initiative in education and saw an impartial and centralised Department of Education as an acceptable compromise among the warring sects.

This centralisation of education, along with time and size, came increasingly to be blamed during the 1960s and 1970s for having produced rigidity of thinking; resistance to change; and for having prevented State departments, teachers and schools alike from being exposed to a livelier, more constant and more demanding scrutiny by private individuals and social groups (Blakers; 1980)

By the late 1960s, however, it was becoming apparent just how successful the public school system had been in producing a literate and articulate 'laity' with corresponding expectations and demands that embodied the seeds of challenge to the governance of that system, as well as to other major social institutions.

The bid by teachers for a more direct role in educational decision-making was to open the way for other challengers, and to have far-reaching effects on the credibility and legitimacy of large centralised State bureaucracies.

Around this time, the Commonwealth began to play what is now a well-established and more direct role in schooling in response to inadequacies and inequalities in school resources and outcomes.

The Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission established by the Whitlam Government provided an articulate and influential voice which emphasised the quality of the school experience being offered and the needs and interests of the direct participants, in line with the opportunities offered by post-war affluence to consider quality-of-life issues and the social implications of education.

In the context of a harsher economic climate, we are now seeing the emergence of a national agenda for schooling.

In April 1989, Australia's State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met as the Australian Education Council and concluded by issuing the Hobart Declaration on Schooling:

> *Conscious that the schooling of Australia's children is the foundation on which to build our future as a nation, Council agreed to act jointly to assist Australian schools in meeting the challenges of our times. In reaching agreement to address the following areas of common concern, the State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education made a historic commitment to improving Australian Schooling within a framework of national collaboration.* (Australian Education Council : 1989)

The Declaration included a statement of common and agreed national goals for schooling in Australia; continuing commitment to national collaboration in curriculum development and the establishment of the Curriculum Corporation of Australia; and the introduction of a system of annual national reporting on schooling. Throughout this same period, moves to devolve responsibility for aspects of schooling to local school communities that had begun in Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, had been spreading to such formerly highly centralised States as Queensland, Western Australia and New South Wales.

Moves to devolution in Victoria began in the context of questioning of the dehumanising effects of large-scale and paternalistic organisations, and of arguments for devolving the control of social institutions and services to those most directly affected, within a framework which included considerations of equity and

equality. Approaching the 1990s, the rationale for devolution in some States and Territories is, in contrast, underpinned by a market ideology, in which schooling is clearly regarded as a consumer good:

> *.....The aim is to foster and reward initiative, effort, enterprise and achievement and to allow our schools to demonstrate quite clearly that they are worth every dollar of public money they attract.*
>
> *.....Incentives, subsidies and opportunities to compete will ensure the resources for school improvement are available if the school community is prepared to do its share.....(p.16).*
>
> *.....Schools which choose not to take up the option (i.e. of availing themselves of a direct block grant to be applied, along with funds they raise themselves, to all aspects of their program) may be required to pay a management fee to the government to cover the costs of administering their funds* (p.20) . Northern Territory Department of Education: 1987

How you may view these respective developments in philosophic and political terms will largely depend upon whether you see schooling, its nature and purposes as the proper business of the wider society - or, at the other extreme, as an extension of the home, and essentially the preserve of parents. Since most Australians see schooling as a balance between these two perspectives, we can expect to see a continuing struggle around the structures and processes for making and implementing policy about schooling, which balance both personal and private, social and public dimensions.

Imperatives for Nationalisation

The current imperatives for nationalisation - for greater cooperation and collaboration among the partners responsible for the nation's schools - are economic, political, social, educational and practical.

The major imperative is the inevitable preoccupation of the Australian Government with managing the national economy. Australia's political and social stability is highly dependent on the national government's ability to manage our participation in an increasingly complex international economy. The Commonwealth

is seeking to be more active and influential in relation to schooling in its role as manager of the national economy. For some time to come, Commonwealth governments, of whatever political colour, will tend to articulate their role in education in terms of the need for a better educated, more skilled and responsive workforce as the basis for a more competitive export sector and economy.

Australians have traditionally preferred to keep implicit the values which underpin public policy. The increasing cultural diversity of our society and the accompanying unwillingness of subordinate groups to accept passively the values of dominant groups provide a good reason to make explicit those values which can be invoked as an agreed basis for public policy. In these circumstances, there is some protection for government in attempting to cooperate in articulating these values at the national level, slightly removed from their own immediate and warring constituencies.

The clearest statement of the educational rationale for national policies in relation to schooling is to be found in the former Schools Commission's report on *The National Policy for the Education of Girls in Australian Schools* (1987).

> *A national policy acknowledges that meeting the educational rights and needs of girls is a responsibility of the nation as a whole; and requires a shared commitment by all authorities responsible for education, acting in collaboration* (1.8).

A national policy for the education of girls will, according to the Report:

- *provide a focus for national concerns relating to the educational needs of all girls in Australian schools;*
- *provide an agreed framework for improving the quality of schooling for girls through a synthesis of current system policies;*
- *clarify and strengthen existing system and school policies as a basis for further commitment;*
- *provide a means for identifying needs and priorities as a basis for future action;*
- *provide a basis for the development of specific programs at the national, state/system and school l evel;*

- *provide a reference point for policy development, including*
- *policies relating to school resource allocation ;*
- *encourage the collaborative use of resources;*
- *provide a basis for monitoring and reporting progress* (1.9).

As the foreword to the Report pointed out, such cooperation is now more practicable than formerly:

> *Technological changes, particularly improved communication, have increasingly enabled exchange and shared development of educational ideas and strategies within Australia and globally. At the same time the effects of these changes have increased recognition of the need for national perspectives and responses in areas of shared concern* (p.(v)).

This report differentiates clearly between Commonwealth policies which relate specifically to the objectives of the Commonwealth government and national policies in education which address matters of agreed concern to school and system authorities, State and Commonwealth, across the nation. Accordingly, it sets out the processes necessary to develop truly national policies, which have the understanding and commitment of all major affected parties.

The enduring and significant debate about common curriculum provides an educational imperative for the collaborative national development of curriculum policy and materials. But the real issue is the need to develop a **comprehensive** curriculum which includes common learning essential to all citizens of not only the nation, but the globe. Whether attempts to devise such a curriculum are best made at the national or State level is not really the most important question at this stage. It would be unfortunate if questions of curriculum **commonality** across State borders overshadowed questions of whether what is being taught within those borders is any **good**, there being no particular virtue in commonality, or for that matter, diversity, for their own sakes.

The most practical, and therefore probably the most powerful imperative towards the nationalisation of schooling is **mobility** - in particular, the portability of student and teacher qualifications and credentials. Continuing attempts to address these issues will, I believe, lead far more surely, inexorably, to the development of

more comparable and compatible programs for the organisation of teaching and learning and related systems of assessment across States than abstract philosophising about the common culture.

The major arguments for and against nationalisation of schooling may be summed up briefly. At best, these moves could provide an opportunity for articulating publicly what this nation considers to be a basic curriculum entitlement for all its children. This could, in turn, provide a basis for an educational guarantee - backed by coherent resourcing agreements among responsible authorities.

At worst, these moves could provide an unhealthy outlet for those obsessed with 'managerialism', as distinct from the proper management of the resources available for teaching and learning, and could promote the reduction of schooling to a narrowly defined core of cheaply-measurable skills. This would satisfy an apparent lust for comparative information on the performance of schools, much like TV ratings and undertaken for the same purposes, to provide market information and a related basis for resource allocation. What is needed, in contrast, is a system of reporting on schools which ensures that the ways in which information on schools is gathered and used does not distort the educational process itself, nor divert resources which might be better invested in teaching and learning in the classroom. This is a system which recognises educational goals and purposes, the diversity of student populations, the complexity of the environment in which students learn, and the long-term and cumulative nature of the learning process and its outcomes.

Imperatives for Devolution

Dissatisfaction with the exclusion of major affected groups from centralised decision-making created the initial imperative, through the 1970s, for devolution of responsibility for aspects of schooling to school communities themselves. Educational arguments for community participation in schooling were most influentially articulated in the public advice of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission, *Schools in Australia* (1973), and of the Schools Commission itself. These centred around the themes of home/school relationships; school/community links; the school as a learning community; the value of educational diversity; and active preparation for democratic citizenship.

I will not elaborate here on these themes. Suffice to say that, in terms of the political spectrum they were arguments congenial to the left. In terms of moisture content they were damp or even wet by today's standards; and in terms of 'ownership' they were public rather than private. The dissatisfaction of influential thinkers and activists with the dominant school curriculum and its inhibiting effects on less privileged groups in society lent force to the imperative to dismantle the centralised bureaucracy, whence it appeared to emanate. With the wisdom of hindsight it became apparent that constructing alternative curricula in schools serving disadvantaged communities could result in curriculum ghettoes and the exclusion of students from the benefits conferred by the mainstream.

These arguments for community participation, through the process of devolution, were soon accommodated, however, into arguments for individualised choice. Using my earlier rating scheme, these were, for a time, a strange combination of left and right wing, wet (since they were accompanied by demands for escalating public funds to underwrite choice), and mixed/private (since they embodied not only individualised choice but the aspirations of marginalised and subordinate groups). If our major newspapers are any guide, the current imperatives for devolution mark a change in our society: the emergence of growing poverty alongside growing affluence, which is creating demands for individualised choice among highly orthodox forms of schooling.

In times of public spending constraint, the political imperative to devolution is obvious. Far better, from a government's point of view, for the local school principal or the head of the school council to explain the increase in class sizes or the absence of ancillary staff support as a natural outcome of his or her decision to pay the electric light bill, get the toilet fixed or buy new readers, than for the government to have to defend budget re-allocatons or cuts.

One imperative for devolution which can be invoked without political embarrassment is, of course, the rights of parents. It is increasingly being accepted that parents should have a prior right and ultimate authority to decide whether a school should charge fees for elective subjects, practice corporal punishment, teach an Asian or a community language, or teach about prevention of AIDS, and should have the major say in whether particular schools should be expanded or closed down.

Just as increasing cultural diversity and the competing demands and aspirations of subordinate groups can be an imperative to centralisation, as it was earlier in our history, so it can be an imperative to decentralisation, to devolution, deregulation and privatisation. Governments, pessimistic of finding any set of shared values on which to base public policy directions or decisions and fearful of trying, can make the decision to leave the task to the market place.

Let me here, then, sum up briefly what I regard as the major arguments for and against devolution. At best, devolution may lead to new, practical working relationships within schools, among professionals and between professionals and parents. It may provide new freedom and energy to undertake imaginative approaches to school improvement, and to produce valuable forms of educational diversity.

Diversity, however, is not an end in itself. While it may be true that no one approach to schooling suits everybody, the sources of demands for diversity encompass motivations ranging from the clearly discriminatory - snobbery, self-interest and the wish to exclude socially subordinate groups - through to antidiscriminatory - the wish to provide for socially subordinate groups, to affirm their interests and preserve their culture. These different motivations cannot be idly grouped together, but must be sorted out at some public level.

Devolution risks the diversion of time from teaching to routine administration, and the relegation of responsibility for education policy to those with short-term and narrow interests. The distinguished British educationist, Mary Warnock reminds us of the dangers of a retreat to parent control:

> *... it should be remembered that a school is not a club or society of adults run by its keener members. It is an educational institution for children, with a life and ethos of its own, with a history, and future that will far outlive the somewhat ephemeral interests in it of any individual parent, who tends to be concerned with the school only while his* (sic) *children are of school age. An educational body must made its own policies and set its own standards, not it is true, without regard to the wishes of parents, but certainly not*

subject to parental whim (Warnock, 1988, p122).

She goes on to remind us that it is futile to believe that overt politicisation of schooling can be avoided by placing power in the hands of parents.

Many of us who are, in our way, political activists also happen to be parents. In the absence of structures which enable us to contribute our legitimate political views on schooling, there is a real temptation in attempting to advance our socialist or anti-socialist, feminist or anti-feminist causes through the education system, to claim a special legitimacy for them through our status as parents. A society that abdicates educational decision-making responsibilities to parents may well damage rather than improve parent/professional relationships. Parents are far from equal in their capacity to defend the interests of their children, and no group is more aware of this fact than teachers. In no way does this deny the importance of parents becoming partners with teachers in children's learning, or of the information and access which makes this possible particularly for those parents themselves denied the benefits of successful formal education.

Assuming that parents as a group act in the best interests of their children, they probably have a greater right than citizens generally, though not an exclusive right, to be entrusted with matters regarding the treatment of children in schools, both their own, and children more generally. It is difficult to see why the fact of parenthood, in itself, confers any particular expertise in relation to broader questions of curriculum and education policy generally.

Current devolutionary trends could have ugly consequences. Take the proposal that local school communities should have the power to decide their own discipline policies, even to the point of practising corporal punishment. It has been a very long time, indeed, since adults subjected ourselves to such an arrangement. In the name of civilisation, we have constructed an elaborate legal system to codify the ways in which our own misdemeanours will be punished, and to protect ourselves against the vagaries of local decision-making by our peers. If adults find it unacceptable to be hit by other adults in positions of power over us, we should have the decency to accord at least the same consideration and protection to defenceless children.

So-called 'healthy' competition between schools can, in practice, degenerate into mean-spirited relationships. Freedom to raise funds at the local level and to decide upon charges and levies can lead to some children being excluded from the pay-as-you-learn parts of the curriculum, from the excursions, and finally from the buses that take the children next door to schools in more expensive suburbs. Forcing schools into intense competition for prestige, students and resources may well breed the kind of cheating we have seen in other spheres - from science to sport. Schools desparate to avoid damaging their reputations in a highly competitive market place will be under pressure to deal with problems through private cover-ups, rather than through responses developed in cooperation with other schools or through systems.

Limitations to Debates about Structures

Changing the locus of educational decision-making to different points along the route from the local school to the national level will not, of itself, address or resolve the questions of teaching and learning which lie at the heart of schooling. The real danger is that debates about nationalisation or privatisation of schooling will prove in the end to have far more to do with constructing political than with constructing educational agenda.

Moreover, the tensions between these two tendencies may well be more illusory than real. Both the national agenda and the devolution agenda can be seen as arms of the same public policy trend, arising from the need to promote public expenditure restraint. One arm of this policy is to target public funds on activities linked to centrally-defined goals and objectives, specified in ways designed to relate to demonstrable outcomes. The other arm is to remove constraints on private funding at the local level within the public school system and to place the responsibility for managing schools with authorities at the local level, and to collect and publish information on the performance of schools.

While schools are always changing, they change in ways over which it is difficult for the community as a whole, through public policy, to have a direct, planned or predictable influence. It is notoriously difficult to change the behaviour of individual teachers and students and what they do in classrooms, from the outside, especially when the incentive of increased resources is not available.

In Australia, there is a need to continue to improve overall educational participation and standards of achievement in the face of a future very different from our recent past. Schools will continue to provide the foundation for this improvement. It is very important, therefore, to ensure that the processes to which we are devoting our attention and energies are those most likely to create the conditions in schools, classrooms and beyond needed to continue this improvement.

What are the major education challenges we face?

Firstly, Australia is undergoing a highly significant process: the gradual extension of a full, formal secondary education of all young people. This process represents the transformation of secondary schooling from being a training ground for a social elite to a universal right. This has involved moving away from institutional separation in the secondary school system, where students were sorted out into occupational tracks with vastly unequal social and economic status and rewards.

That process, vital to our future as a democratic nation, is causing some pain, arising both from perceptions and from actual practice. Let me deal first with perceptions and, in particular, the perceptions of the already privileged that more always means worse.

The average Australian high school would have been a cruel affront to a Mr Downer, quoted by Pavla Miller in her book *Long Division* on the development of State secondary schooling in South Australia. Mr Downer expressed bluntly his fears that this would undermine the exclusiveness and, therefore, the value of educational provisions for the rich:

> *To provide that the inmates of the Destitute Asylum would have supplied to them raspberry jam tarts after each meal would be no more a luxury than to provide this higher education for people who had no business with it. It was interfering with the very laws of nature. Some must be higher and some lower, but this was trying to make an average of the whole lot and top turn a great number of first rate labourers into indifferent scholars* (Miller, 1986, p.132).

Rejecting an education system built on pedigree rather than

potential should not blind us, however, to the very real difficulties we face, in practice, in developing a comprehensive school system, let alone a system of comprehensive schools, with forms of curriculum and assessment which guarantee:

- educationally and vocationally defensible paths for all students;
- a core of essential, common studies to prepare all students for
- shared, active and informed citizenship;
- sufficient diversity to accommodate occupational choice, personal interests, and differences in application, attainment and performances.

This is a tall order, and one we have not yet learned to deliver.

Perceptions cannot be ignored. Despite the lack of evidence that, overall, pupil achievement is any better in selective than comprehensive schools, trends in the development of non-government schools appear to tell us that the perceptions of the well-off are otherwise.

If we look at **growth** in non-government school enrolments during the 1980s, it appears that there has been a far more significant expansion of high-fee-type (non systemic) schools in the secondary than in the primary sector.

The significant expansion in low-fee-type schools appears, however, mainly in the primary sector, possibly then extending into secondary.

This reflects divergence between what have been described as 'schools of commitment' - set up to imbue children while they are young with a particular set of religious or educational values, and those schools which target the socially and academically competitive end of schooling.

The impatience and frustration of the affluent with secondary schools trying to cater for the full range of students - those bound directly for employment and training, as well as for the universities - is shared by many of those this change is intended to benefit. In Australia and comparable countries, we have far to go in developing schools with the capacity to engage the commitment, the interests and energies of the majority of young people, particularly those who want, understandably, to leave school with immediately marketable

skills.

In my view, we must persevere with constructing educationally comprehensive institutions for our young people, and resist the temptation to relapse into forms of diversity which are highly likely to promote social divisiveness and economic stagnation. This is what will occur, however, if we continue to put the full weight of responsibility for comprehensive education on our schools.

The best way to sustain and develop comprehensive secondary schooling is by supporting the development of formal career and educational pathways beyond the school. At our present stage of experience and expertise, some groups of students will need to take less direct routes than others, for example, towards higher education. What should not be accepted is the continued premature foreclosing of that option for so many students and workers.

I have used the term 'unification' in the title of this paper. By this, I mean integration and coordination of the education, training, higher education and employment sectors.

The development of a unified system of education, training and employment will require opening curriculum, teaching and assessment in higher education particularly to the same scrutiny as is applied to schools. The introduction of discipline reviews in higher education represent a constructive move in this direction.

Teacher quality is the second issue I want to bring forward here as the other major educational challenge we face.

In all professions there are outstanding individuals whose regular standard of performance is nothing short of hypnotic. There are, and always have been, such teachers - teachers who are to learning as Dr Grantly Dick Read was held to be to childbirth - rendering it both enjoyable and painless. Regrettably, there are not enough of these super-human professionals to go around all of us who need them. There are, as well, teachers who have had the good sense to confine their efforts to the privileged and who attain greatness through teaching those most likely to join the ranks of the great and famous. The names of these great teachers, and teachers of the great, dot literature rather than history. And all the evidence there is that the reputation of the profession as a whole has never been high:

Let schoolmasters puzzle their brain

with grammar and nonsense and learning.
Good liquor I stoutly maintain
gives genius a better discerning.
Oliver Goldsmith

You sought the last resort of feeble minds with classical educations. You became a schoolmaster.
Aldous Huxley, Antic Hay 1923

From Goldsmith, Dickens, Bronte, Lawrence ... we have a picture of a lowly profession.

I labour this point because of determined efforts now being made to convince us that there was once a time when the profession bathed in public esteem. If teachers were never greatly respected as a profession, that makes our problem different, but probably worse. For then the low standing of the profession can be seen as having more to do with a longstanding lack of respect for children and, perhaps, for learning, than with any recent developments in the profession itself.

In its issues paper on teacher quality currently being circulated widely for discusssion, the Schools Council has been careful to state that:

> · *teachers are better qualified and longer trained than at any time in our history;*
> · *teaching methods are more varied and less formal;*
> · *there is greater awareness among teachers and better provision for those students disadvantaged for various reason of race, location, language, gender, disability or personal resources* (Schools Council, 1989, p.12).

However, the increasing demands being made on our schools and our teachers by the community and by governments require that these improvements continue and that our teachers are adequate to the tasks that they will face.

The Council has, at the same time, concluded that it is essential that all governments in Australia recognise that in any strengthening of Australia's schools the quality, morale and status of the teaching service will be a key, if not the most the important,

element.

In taking this stance, the Council has not adopted an innovative or radical role. Rather, it is reflecting a concern and a realisation common across national and international boundaries. There are many significant signs that the attractiveness of teaching as a profession is declining, and this can have only negative implications for the maintenance, let alone improvement, of teacher quality. The reduced attraction of teaching as a career is demonstrated by recent trends in Queensland. Of those applying for tertiary places, the proportion indicating a first preference for teacher education has fallen from 16.9% in 1985 to 10.3% in 1989. There is no reason to believe that this data from one State is atypical. This decline in the proportion of tertiary applicants seeking to enter teaching is accompanied by a decline in the tertiary entry scores of applicants and of those admitted to teacher education programs. While there is not necessarily a high correlation between academic ability and subsequent success in teaching, it is hard to argue that teaching should not attract a reasonable proportion of young people ranked highly on traditional measures of scholastic aptitude and a spread of abilities similar to other major disciplines and professions.

In particular, the Schools Council believes that a major prerequisite to improving the initial and ongoing training of teachers is better coordination between higher education institutions and school systems in preservice and inservice teacher education.

Through higher education institutions, the Commonwealth government has accepted a large measure of responsibility for initial training of teachers. The Schools Council argues that this responsibility can and should be extended in the inservice education and training area, but under direction of employing authorities. That is, schools and school systems must have the capacity to command appropriately devised inservice education and training courses to suit the needs of practising teachers in schools. It is therefore suggesting the establishment of committees at school system level consisting of representatives of higher education institutions, employers, teachers and parents whose functions would include coordinating and developing the efforts of higher education institutions and school employing authorities in providing teacher education both pre- and post-service, which has schools as the principal focus.

It is not only through faculties of teacher education that higher

educations institutions can make a significant contribution to teacher quality. An area of great importance is upgrading of teachers' knowledge in particular discipline areas. Some higher education institutions, either acting alone or in concert with employing authorities, have been providing lectures and seminars for teachers to bring them up to date with recent advances in knowledge.

The Schools Council believes that this should be a much more systematic and regular part of the work of higher education institutions and should, in itself, constitute a real contribution to the work of schools and teachers. It would be regrettable if the current moves to establish a unified national system of higher education institutions resulted in decisions, in the context of institutional autonomy, which jeopardised the need for this closer working relationship between the higher education and the schools sector.

I have described what I believe are the two major educational challenges facing schools. The first, the gradual extension of a full formal secondary education or its equivalent to all young people. The second, the maintenance and enhancement of teacher quality.

I have also described the energy being invested in the processes of, on the other hand, nationalisation, and on the other, privatisation of schooling.

It may well prove that current processes of restructuring, with their destabilising effects on public school systems in particular, may prove largely irrelevant to meeting these important education challenges.

I do not advocate a disregard for structures. There comes a point, however, where continuing attempts to reform processes and structures and to change the locus of decision-making can no longer be a substitute for facing up to substantive questions of education policy. The effective governance of schools cannot be reduced to simple issues of centralisation or devolution of decision-making.

The past decades have created greater understanding of the forces available to sustain and improve the quality of schooling. These include: increasingly articulate school communities able to represent the immediate needs being experienced at the local level by those directly affected by education policies; teacher pressure, professional and industrial, for quality education; community perceptions of schooling as expressed, for example, in voting behaviour, which provides an important guide to education policy; and the

cumulative competence and experience of professionals, teachers and administrators, at the school and system level.

These forces need to be harnessed at the various levels of decision-making. This would entail complementary expressions of participative and representative democracy at all levels. At the central level of public school systems, we need a set of more mature structures and processes for community participation in consultation and decision-making to support the development and implementation of public policy, and to reinforce the importance and consolidate the quality of schooling. At the level of local school communities, structures and processes for participative decision-making need to be linked more directly to those at the central level, to ensure that decisions are being made within the framework of public policy.

The tendency towards greater national collaboration among Commonwealth and State authorities is inexorable; though political will, leadership and energy will be needed to orchestrate the process. The tendency towards devolution is likely to prove far more limited. Revenue-raising powers in Australia are concentrated at the State and Commonwealth level. State education ministers remain as directly responsible as ever for schooling. In the absence of legislative changes to devolve this centralised authority, it is difficult to see real devolution occurring. The risk is that, in the process, time and energy which should be devoted to teaching and learning will be devoted to administering small amounts of discretionary funding at the school level.

The changes needed to expand and improve secondary education and to enhance teacher quality require energy to be directed to the development of a comprehensive and unified system of education. By this I mean a system of preschools, schools, training, employment and higher education institutions, where all sectors see themselves as united in a common cause - the continuing life-long education of the Australian public.

An important first step is greater support from higher education institutions for teaching, so that schools can produce students who are better equipped candidates for all spheres of Australian society as well, in turn, as for those institutions themselves. Assessment and accreditation procedures which ensure maximum portability across educational institutions at all levels, will provide

greater security for the development of a comprehensive secondary school system, where those who will later work together can acquire the necessary skill and experience; and where those who perform at an advanced level of competence can lead and assist others to mutual advantage. While successful completion of a full secondary education should continue to be encouraged for all, alternative opportunities must be developed for those who inevitably leave earlier to gain wider education and training by other appropriate means.

In conclusion, I wish to underline the need for the development of a unified system of education in Australia to be underpinned by a far more intensive educational, research and development effort. There is, at present, a dearth of information gathered through reputable methodologies as a basis for the development of policy options and public debate about them. More sophisticated information is needed on patterns of educational participation, attainment and achievement; on the learning environment of schools; on schools resourcing; and on attitudes and expectations.

I referred above to the gap between education policy and practice. Even greater is the gap between both policy and practice and public perceptions. In the absence of a serious commitment to policy related studies, Australians are resorting to an over-reliance on perceptions. Transmitting to middle Australia the messages that scientific sampling has detected what it wants to hear, populism for its own sake, may be good politics. But the substance of policy and indeed the essence of successful government, is what counts when the good feelings pass. A reliance on public opinion as a definitive guide to education policy will, by definition, give undue weight to those whose interest in schooling is uninformed, incidental, and indirect (Cavalier: 1988).

The development of a comprehensive, unified education system demands the energies of those whose interest is informed by study and experience, purposeful, long-term and direct.

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